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ABSTRACT

The process of long-range planning, political considerations, and approaches to the publication of such plans, are examined, based on the experience at Western Carolina University, North Carolina, a public regional institution conferring bachelor's and master's degrees. A key element for a successful strategic planning effort is the involvement of campus constituencies, based on a top-down, bottom-up planning process, which is described. The plan should cover from 4-10 years, and the planning publication should be revised every 2 years. It is suggested that budgetary figures be excluded from the long-range plan but that the long-range plan be a major part of the budgetary process. The format of the plan should include a short description of organization, its function, and responsibilities; short- and long-range goals and objectives, and unit projections for items, such as enrollments, revenues, or units of work. Additional aspects of a long-range plan include: the need to be consistent with the institution's mission; the availability of a historical database; the existence of an organization to administer the planning process and an adequate staff to edit and publish the plan; and a process to evaluate the progress toward goals of each administrative unit. (SW)

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# ISSUES IN PUBLISHING A UNIVERSITY-WIDE LONG-RANGE PLAN

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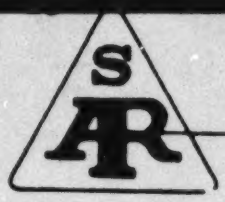


SOUTHERN ASSOCIATION FOR INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH

This paper was presented at the 1982 Annual Conference of the Southern Association for Institutional Research held in Birmingham, Alabama, October 1982. It was reviewed by the SAIR Publications Committee and was judged to be of high quality and of interest to others concerned with the research in higher education. This paper has therefore been selected to be included in the ERIC collection of Conference Papers.

Gerald W. McLaughlin
President, SAIR

ISSUES IN PUBLISHING A UNIVERSITY-WIDE LONG-RANGE PLAN

The purpose of this paper is to address selected issues for consideration in publishing a university-wide long-range plan. The type of long-range plan most appropriate for a given college or university is determined by numerous factors including the character and style of the institution and its upper level management team and the political environment of the individual campus. Political considerations in publishing a university-wide long-range plan are vitally important to the success of planning efforts. This paper briefly examines the process of long-range planning, outlines certain approaches to the publication of such plans, and presents political considerations of the planning process. The theory is compared with actual observations at a regional public institution of higher education conferring bachelor and master degrees. The authors advocate a planning operation that culminates in the publication of a bound, university-wide, long-range plan containing a summarized easily readable version of each planning unit's internal long-range plan every two years to be widely distributed on campus and to supervisory boards.

The views expressed in this paper are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the policies of the regional public university described herein or of its Long-Range Planning Committee. The concepts contained in this paper emanate from experience at Western Carolina University, a public regional institution conferring bachelor and master degrees and may not apply to independent institutions or to other public institutions of lesser or greater complexity.

Long-range, or strategic, planning for a college or university can be defined as:

> Strategic planning is a periodic effort designed to describe the overall mission, objectives, and programs of the institution, governing board or a given department for a set period of time.[1]

Hollowood points out that strategic planning is only a portion of a larger challenge, that of the management of diversity. Strategic planning and management must occur at both the strategy center and the institutional levels and require a cross-functional and cross-program perspective.[2]

For any long-range planning process the following points are important and help to insure thoughtful and responsible input from the units reporting.

(1) A fundamental requirement for a meaningful long-range planning process is support for the process by the president. Miller also notes the need of similar support by the Board of Trustees.[3]

(2) A mission statement for the institution is necessary to provide planning guidance for each of the planning units to insure its goals and objectives will correspond to the overall mission of the institution. Kloeze, Molenkamp, and Roelofs characterizes top management's approach as "overall strategic" providing general orientation in the formulation of strategy.[4]

(3) Assumptions concerning both internal and external factors, including enrollment trends, the economy, opportunities, disadvantages to be overcome, and other environmental conditions, should be provided to all the planning units to serve as a base for their plans. While some variance in the level of optimism should be expected from the units, the existence of common assumption should aid in reducing the range of such variations. Kahalas describes such assumptions concerning internal and external factors as premises and constraints and declares forecasting to be an essential part of establishing planning premises and constraints.[5]

(4) An historical database of numbers critical to the institution must be available on which the planning units can base statistical projections. These numbers might include such information as enrollment, revenue, or work units handled during previous periods. Naylor outlines various methods for effective use of forecasting and modeling in manipulating an historical database for a planning unit.[6]

(5) An organization to administer the planning process should be present or created. This unit is rarely involved in any university planning of its own, but it should be available to listen to the plans of the various major units to assure the goals and objectives of those units are not contradictory to the overall objectives of the institution and, more importantly, to afford the upper level administrative units an opportunity to present and defend their plans. This organization could consist of administrators, faculty, and staff members. Christopher urges the utilization of a dialog within the planning units to promote sound conceptualization of strategic plans.[7]

(6) An adequate and competent staff must be available to edit and publish the plan. One cannot assume that all materials received from the planning units will be submitted in common format or even in acceptable grammar. Naylor states,

> Another necessary condition for integrating strategic planning into the decision process is adequate technical support from the management science, planning, and data processing staffs. Without good technical support the entire system may collapse.[8]

(7) A process must be set up to evaluate the progress toward goals and objectives of each administrative unit on a time frame generally

corresponding to the renewal and revision efforts of the previous long-range plan. Donnelly notes,

> It then remains for the management team to implement the strategic plan, measure performance against the plan, and periodically update the plan and the organization as conditions warrant.[9]

(8) The plan must be an input to the budget consideration process. If budgets are prepared and approved without consideration of the plans previously conceived, the long-range plan will become a meaningless document. Malernee and Jaffee also contend that successful strategic planning requires a thorough analysis of the financial implications of the strategic alternatives.[10]

The role of a central planning organization is vital to the success of the planning process.

> The purpose of the "ideal" centralized comprehensive planning unit is as follows: To assure the coordination, development and continuing review of both long- and short-range plans for all academic and administrative units in the institution; to facilitate rational decision making and continuous policy review to provide comprehensive and timely information and communication systems; and to provide appropriate framework and staff support for accomplishment of the aforementioned activities based on well established institutional policies and procedures.[11]

The planning effort to generate a campus-wide document should be similar to other campus planning processes, i.e., it should include all individuals capable of making decisions which could affect the future of the institution. Included in this group would be faculty, department heads, deans, directors, vice presidents and, of course, the president. Miller asserts that the involvement of representatives from appropriate constituencies is a critical criteria in a planning effort.[12] Initially, the process should involve a top-down procedure which allows the president and vice presidents to express their broad goals and objectives for the planning period based on their unique

overview and perspective of the institutional situation. The deans should develop their goals and objectives using the vice presidential goals as a guide. Both sets of goals and objectives should be forwarded to the department heads for use in the formulation of departmental plans. The faculty members develop the departmental objectives. Then the bottom-up process is initiated. The departmental objectives are reviewed by the appropriate dean who has the opportunity to add objectives to his previous plan or modify his objectives to conform with those offered by the departments. Needless to say, the dean also has the option of rejecting certain goals or objectives presented by the departments when he considers such goals or objectives to be inappropriate in the long-range plan for his school or college. Similarly this bottom-up procedure is followed by the vice presidents and finally the president; each one having an opportunity to amend or revise long-range plans previously developed during the top-down planning phase. Nutt outlines numerous planning techniques for various phases of the planning process.[13] The planning procedure used at various levels is not within the scope of this paper. Nonetheless, because of the importance of multi-level planning procedures, it is strongly recommended that workshops be held for those individuals involved in the planning process when time and resources permit.

The top-down, bottom-up approach does place some restriction on the scope of the individual department's long-range plans by allowing administrators to define their concept of the major thrusts of the institution during the planning period. However, this approach does not represent "administrative planning by grand scheme" as decried by David G. Brown[14] but represents an incremental, decentralized system and, if handled properly, at the departmental level, makes long-range planning a primary responsibility of each professor.

The top-down, bottom-up approach also places the responsibility for implementation on the unit planning the activity.[15]

The planning period should be a relatively long period of time -- at least four to six years, although it is desirable to incorporate short-range goals into the plan as well. If the institution is on a biennial budgeting scheme, the six-year plan may be more appropriate than one for five or seven years. The planning process should be repeated at least every two to three years to allow the university and the individual planning units to alter direction as necessary to respond to changing situations and to allow the units to monitor their progress toward the plans previously stated. Breneman stresses the need for accurate information and communication between all parties in the planning efforts for the turbulent 1980s[16]; periodic review of progress provides crucial feedback for necessary adjustments in thrusts for an institution.

The mechanics for the preparation of the long-range plan should be as simple as possible, particularly with regard to the format for input by the various units submitting plans. The format should require (1) a short description of organization, its function and responsibilities; (2) short- and long-range goals and objectives; and (3) unit projections for items, such as enrollments, revenues, or units of work. Miller notes,

> One characteristic of an objective which contributes to both its functional and technical quality is its capacity for evaluation or measurability. an objective must define the circumstance, condition, event or evidence that will be used to establish when or to what extent, the objective is achieved.[17]

The planning unit should be encouraged to construct its goals and objectives as quantifiably as possible but cognizant of the reality that some educational goals and objectives are not measurable in an absolute sense.

The most significant consideration in the mechanics of having the long-

range plans prepared is to restrict the information submitted from each unit to a readable length. This length should be no more than one page for departments and lower level administrative units and should not be significantly longer for deans and vice presidents. The publication of a long-range plan with units longer than this would make the document bulky and much less likely to be read by its recipients. The philosophy of length restriction is that if the objective is not worthy of being in the first page then it probably should not be promulgated to the audience of the university-wide long-range plan. This philosophy suggests that most units should have their own detailed long-range plans which would include additional goals and objectives. The detailed unit plan should also include a plan to reach those goals and objectives. Other major planning activities of the university, such as a campus master plan for physical facilities, streets, landscaping, etc., should be represented in the campus-wide long-range plan only in an abbreviated format; the university-wide long-range plan is not the appropriate forum for those plans in their entirety.

When all plans have been composed, submitted, and approved by the proper authority, a major effort is required to translate these plans into a common format and similar language without changing the intended meanings of the plans. The quality of plans submitted by the individual planning units will vary significantly. Some plans will require basic grammatical correction, while others will be ready for inclusion into the university-wide long-range plan immediately without any modification.

Long-range plans have been produced in a multitude of formats at different institutions. Some have utilized the looseleaf variation in which each planning

unit produces its pages of the long-range plan and updates the plan as necessary. The looseleaf format has several drawbacks including the difficulty of distributing the plan widely, the Herculean task of keeping the distributed copies current as changes occur, and the difficulty of reading a plan consisting of many and varied writing styles. Other institutions do not restrict the units in the length of their plan components and compile very large volumes of data that are not easily reproducible or maintainable across the campus. Finally, many institutions' long-range plans are documents dealing primarily with budgeting needs rather than specific listings of goals and objectives for each unit without the details of the resources required to attain those objectives.

The authors of this paper advocate the publication of a long-range plan in a bound format to be made available to the members of the Board of Trustees, the library, and each planning unit of the institution. Major advantages of this approach are:

(1) Each unit's objectives are available to the campus community.

(2) Each planning unit is committed to a program to be accomplished within a given period of time.

(3) The normal business communication channels between units should be improved by making the plan available to all units of the campus.

(4) This approach provides a comprehensive overview of organizations on the campus and their functions; for many campuses, this might be the only place such a directory is available in one convenient location.

(5) Each unit's objectives are placed out in the open for evaluation

by budgetary and other organizations on the campus, thereby dispelling the image of the decision-making process being carried out in smoke-filled rooms or in ivory towers.

The most obvious disadvantages of a bound document would be the impossible task of updating the document and the cost of publication. A new version of the plan should be published every two years, allowing each planning unit to completely replace the section appearing in the previous edition. This periodic updating process, in conjunction with the annual budgeting cycle, has made the request for interim updates nonexistent. The cost of publication (less than $500) is insignificant as compared to the cost of the effort expended to prepare the copy.

The final area to be considered in this paper is the political considerations of the planning process, including the relationship between long-range planning and the budgetary process of the institution. Narayanan and Fahey state that strategic decision making is triggered in organizations by strategic issues, with particular reference to the evolution of coalitions around issues or conflicts.[18] The authors suggest that the long-range planning information should exclude detailed budget data for these reasons:

(1) Realities of the budget often restrict innovation.

(2) Experience indicates many objectives can be attained by internally reallocating resources within the planning unit.

(3) Budgets extrapolated over five to six years often do not represent reality either in the amount of money that could be reasonably expected to be allocated to the university or in the amount of money that the budgetary process might allocate to that particular unit.

(4) The direct relationship of long-range plans and obviously unobtainable

budgets may provide an excuse for the planning unit not to pursue even the initial steps toward accomplishing the objective.

While the authors suggest that the long-range plan exclude budgetary data, they urge that the long-range plan be an integral part of the budgetary process. To accomplish this, the budget request must relate to the long-range plans of the requesting unit. The budget allocation organization then must consider budget requests in relation to the long-range plan and pointedly question new or expanded programs not appearing in the requesting unit's long-range plan.

Narayanan and Fahey state,

> The political perspective traces the influence of organizational context and portrays how internal political processes determine or modify strategy content. It is suspected that effective top managers have an intuitive grasp of these political processes and it is suggested that effective strategic management entails managing organizational context just as much as the strategic content. Development and refinement of the political perspective therefore is necessary for an understanding of strategic management.[19]

In summary, a published campus-wide, long-range plan can greatly benefit an institution. The same support required of any planning process is an essential element for the published campus-wide, long-range plan with the additional requirement of a competent and adequate staff to edit and publish the plan. Another key consideration for a successful strategic planning effort is the involvement in the planning process of each individual on the campus who could affect the future of the institution. The authors suggest serious consideration of the top-down, bottom-up planning process described herein. The plan should cover a reasonably lengthy time period with perhaps four years the minimum and ten years the maximum; however, there should be a revised edition every two years. The mechanics of preparing the long-range

plan should be based on the KISS (Keep It Simple Stupid) principle. The document should not be much over one hundred pages long if it is expected to be read by the constituency. Each part of the plan must be edited into a similar format to improve readability. The authors urge that budgetary figures be excluded from the long-range plan, noting that it is imperative that the long-range plan be a major input into any budgetary process within the institution. Political considerations in publishing a university-wide, long-range plan are essential to the success of strategic planning efforts. The authors addressed in this paper selected issues for consideration in publishing a university-wide, long-range plan and advocate a planning operation which culminates in the publication of a bound, university-wide, long-range plan every two years to be widely distributed to supervisory boards and to all planning units on campus.

NOTES

[1]John Edgar Miller, "Planning In Small Colleges", Planning for Higher Education November 1980, p.26.

[2]James R. Hollowood, "College and University Strategic Planning: A Methodological Approach", Planning for Higher Education Summer 1981, p.16.

[3]John Edgar Miller, p.25.

[4]H. J. Kloeze, A. Molenkamp and F. G. W. Roelofs, "Strategic Planning and Participation: A Contradiction in Terms?" Long Range Planning October 1980, p.15.

[5]Harvey Kahalas, "A Look at Planning and Its Components", Managerial Planning January/February 1982, p.15.

[6]Thomas H. Naylor, "Effective Use of Strategic Planning, Forecasting, and Modeling in the Executive Suite", Managerial Planning January/February 1982, p.4.

[7]William F. Christopher, "Is the Annual Planning Cycle Really Necessary?", Management Review August 1981, p.40.

[8]Thomas H. Naylor, "How to Integrate Strategic Planning Into Your Management Process", Long Range Planning October 1981, p.61.

[9]Robert M. Donnelly, "Strategic Planning for Better Management", Managerial Planning November/December 1981, p.5.

[10]James K. Malernee, Jr. and Gary Jaffe, "An Integrative Approach to Strategic and Fiancial Planning", Managerial Planning January/February 1982, p.35.

[11]Shirley E. Salloway and Martha W. Tast, "Comprehensive Planning: An Organizational Approach", Planning for Higher Education October 1978, p.5.

[12]John Edgar Miller, p.25.

[13]Paul C. Nutt, "Hybrid Planning Methods", Academy of Management Review 1982 vol.7 no.3, pp. 442-454.

[14]David G. Brown, "The Supreme Role of Faculty in Planning: Why and How?", Planning for Higher Educat[illegible] June 1975, p.3.

[15]V. R. Hansen, "Planning Through a Decentralized Process Case Study: University of Wisconsin-Start", Planning for Higher Education June 1979, p.17.

[16]David W. Breneman, "Higher Education and the Economy", Educational Record Spring 1981, p.21.

[17]John Edgar Miller, p.27.

[18]V. K. Narayanan and Liam Fahey, "The Micro-Politics of Strategy Formulation", Academy of Management Review 1982, vol.7 no.1, p.25.

[19]Ibid, p.33.